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## **Spatially-concentrated worklessness and neighbourhood policies: experiences from New Labour in England**

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## **Spatially-concentrated worklessness and neighbourhood policies: experiences from New Labour in England**

### **Abstract**

The persistence and entrenchment of spatial concentrations of worklessness is a key characteristic of labour markets in advanced industrial economies. Understanding the causes of worklessness concentrated within particular neighbourhoods requires linking together an understanding of wider processes of labour market restructuring with the operation of various negative cycles that reinforce patterns of persistent worklessness. Such cycles are particularly rooted within person and household factors and the overall population mix, and are compounded by the operation of housing markets and neighbourhood effects. This chapter considers the precise role of neighbourhood effects in relation to the wider causes of concentrated worklessness and then considers the development and effectiveness of work-related neighbourhood policies. Through an examination of the extensive set of employment related initiatives developed under successive New Labour governments in relation to deprived neighbourhoods, this chapter considers the aims, outcomes and effectiveness of these initiatives and identifies the factors that constrained the ability of this policy agenda to transform the employment fortunes of England's most deprived neighbourhoods.

### **Introduction**

The issue of work and worklessness<sup>1</sup> has been at the centre of policy concerns relating to the need to tackle deprivation concentrated within particular neighbourhoods (Syrett and North, 2008). Yet although worklessness concentrated in particular neighbourhoods is a widespread and enduring feature of the contemporary employment landscape, attempts to address this challenge have frequently had limited success. In part this reflects a recurrent failure of policy interventions to understand how the causes of concentrated worklessness are rooted within the interaction between person and household factors, the workings of labour and housing markets operating at wider spatial scales, and the characteristics of particular neighbourhoods. Critically, although the challenge of concentrated worklessness is manifested at the neighbourhood level, effective policy responses require integrated actions across a

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'worklessness' relates to those individuals involuntarily excluded from the labour market and claiming out-of-work benefits, including various forms of unemployment and incapacity/disability benefit.

variety of spatial levels. This requires understanding that the role of neighbourhood effects in causing concentrated worklessness is limited but that recognising the distinctive characteristics of neighbourhoods is central to the design and implementation of effective policy interventions.

In this chapter we explore the causes of worklessness concentrated at the neighbourhood level and the effectiveness of policy attempts by successive New Labour governments to reduce the high levels of worklessness that characterise England's most deprived neighbourhoods. The chapter first analyses how localised negative cycles combine with broader processes of labour market change to reinforce patterns of concentrated worklessness. The particular role of neighbourhood effects within these processes is considered and the important differences in the nature of employment deprivation between deprived neighbourhoods recognised. The chapter then considers the development and effectiveness of work-related neighbourhood policies. Through an examination of the wide-ranging employment-related initiatives developed in relation to deprived neighbourhoods between 1997 and 2010 in England, the chapter considers the aims, outcomes and effectiveness of these initiatives and their relationship to the developing evidence base. The chapter concludes by identifying the limitations of this neighbourhood policy agenda and why it was unable to transform the employment fortunes of England's most deprived neighbourhoods.

### **Causes of concentrated worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods**

The persistence of worklessness concentrated in particular neighbourhoods has led to much debate as to the precise role of neighbourhood effects in explaining this phenomenon. Most studies of work and worklessness in relation to deprived neighbourhoods have concluded that neighbourhood effects have only a minimal additional impact over and above the characteristics and circumstances of individuals and households (Fieldhouse and Tranmer, 2001; Buck and Gordon, 2004; Sanderson, 2006; Nunn et al, 2010). Yet these studies also recognise that certain neighbourhood effects can compound problems of worklessness through direct effects that flow from the characteristics of the resident population as well as, the characteristics of the place itself, notably in terms of relative levels of physical isolation

In fact understanding the existence and persistence of worklessness in particular areas requires analysis of the interaction between two key factors: first, how broader processes of labour market restructuring produce patterns of job loss and sectoral

change which impact upon the numbers and types of jobs available within particular local economies within which neighbourhoods are located; second, how a series of place-based interactions operate to create and maintain concentrated worklessness in particular neighbourhoods.

### *Economic restructuring and labour market change*

The evolving geographies of labour markets associated with global economic shifts in production, consumption and exchange and a changed territorial basis for economic competitiveness, relate to the existence of concentrated worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods in complex ways. Many neighbourhoods characterised by high levels of employment deprivation are associated with older industrial areas left redundant and in need of reinvention by processes of economic change. But high levels of worklessness concentrated within particular neighbourhoods are also a feature of prosperous high growth city-regions. Central to understanding this relationship between neighbourhoods enduring high levels of worklessness and wider contexts of economic change, are the related processes of sectoral restructuring and the changing nature and type of employment.

The sectoral restructuring that has taken place through processes of deindustrialisation and service sector growth has created new geographies of job loss and growth (Turok and Edge, 1999; Webber and Swinney, 2010). Within the UK, neighbourhoods with high levels of worklessness are disproportionately located within areas of former manufacturing and coalmining activity, situated in inner city areas of large metropolitan cities, northern towns and cities, 'one-industry' towns and outer urban areas. The loss of traditional manufacturing jobs has negatively impacted not only on particular areas but also on specific groups (e.g. older men, single parents, ethnic minorities).

However the existence of concentrated worklessness relates not only to the geography of job loss but also the geography of new sources of employment and the type of jobs being created. During the period of sustained employment increase in the UK from the early 1990s until the 2008 economic downturn, a mismatch was evident between the former geography of employment and the newly emergent geographies of job growth. New and existing enterprises have frequently favoured locations towards the edge of towns or in smaller towns. Many new employment opportunities have developed on the edge of urban areas, rather than inner cities, and new firm formation, retail activity and emerging markets frequently have been attracted to accessible areas outside large urban areas. Migration and commuting flows have to some extent compensated for this

mismatch, but these processes remain a weak means of adjusting residential patterns of the working age population to employment opportunities (Beatty et al, 1997). This is because, for those with few or no skills, competing for jobs elsewhere is difficult, whilst for many individuals their ties to families, friends and places and related issues of quality of life, makes out migration unattractive. For those on low wages with restricted transport mobility, the possibilities of longer range commuting are limited.

However the issue is not only one concerning the changing geographies of job loss and job creation but also the types of jobs being created. Recent job growth has been strongly focused within the service sector and characterised by an increasing polarisation between well-paid and high-skilled professional working in the 'knowledge-based' sectors and a large flexible workforce comprising low paid workers in insecure and low-grade service sector employment (Goos and Manning, 2007). In labour market areas experiencing higher levels of worklessness, the new service sector jobs have been concentrated primarily within consumer, personal and public services, rather than in business and producer services. In consequence, for residents in poorer neighbourhoods who are less competitive in the labour market, it is low-skill, low wage insecure jobs that are most likely to provide a route into the labour market. Yet such jobs are often unattractive in terms of their pay, conditions and career development potential, and for those in receipt of benefits, the low level of wages may result in a minimal, or no, increase in overall household income (Beatty et al, 2009a).

#### *Concentrated worklessness, cycles of decline and neighbourhood effects*

The geography of concentrated worklessness within particular neighbourhoods only partially reflects the wider patterns of changes in employment and jobs discussed so far. Localities that endure concentrated worklessness are commonly characterised by multiple dimensions of deprivation (e.g. in relation to health, education, housing, environment and crime etc.) that act to mutually reinforce one another to create and reinforce spatially concentrated deprivation. These interrelated causes of deprivation are frequently conceptualised in terms of 'vicious cycles' that lock neighbourhoods into ongoing poverty and deprivation. In relation to work, a series of vicious circles can be identified that link local unemployment to local social outcomes and then further reduce the employment prospects of residents in the short and longer term (Gordon, 2003). Issues such as access to job information, short-term jobs creating interrupted work histories, health deterioration, family fragmentation - notably the impact of lone parenthood - and educational underachievement are particularly important here. Taken together, these largely social forces tend to reproduce spatial concentrations of

unemployment, even if the original reason for high unemployment was in fact something quite different.

In seeking to explain localised concentrations of worklessness, a number of interrelated processes need to be considered. First, between these areas and areas with higher levels of employment and job opportunities, there is a lack of effective equilibrating processes, via migration and commuting, which reinforces existing concentrations (Gordon, 2003). Second, spatial externalities in the housing market lead to residential sorting processes (Cheshire et al, 2003). These act to concentrate workless populations where low-cost rented property and the location of social housing predominate within certain neighbourhoods (MacLennan, 2000). Third, those with a history of a lack of employment and job loss suffer a 'scarring effect' making them more vulnerable to further unemployment which is reinforced when concentrated in particular neighbourhoods (Burgess et al, 2003). Finally, although problems of worklessness are rooted principally within the characteristics and circumstances of individuals and households, various neighbourhood effects can be identified which act to compound these problems (Buck and Gordon, 2004; Sanderson, 2006). Such neighbourhood effects relate principally to socialisation processes, the nature and extent of social capital, stigmatisation and discrimination, and the relative physical isolation of deprived neighbourhoods.

#### *Socialisation processes: cultures of worklessness*

The most contentious area of debate related to neighbourhood effects and worklessness relates to whether deprived neighbourhoods are characterised by localised 'cultures of worklessness'; that is a distinctive set of attitudes, norms and values relating to work that lie outside those of mainstream society. Such cultures are said to be characterised by an expectation of welfare benefits, a normalisation of illegal behaviour and the emergence of a set of values at variance to those of mainstream society (Murray, 1996). Yet there is little evidence to support notions of the existence of 'cultures of worklessness' within deprived neighbourhoods within the UK (Lupton, 2003; ODPM, 2004). In fact Lupton (2003) concluded in her study that what was most remarkable was the extent to which excluded communities endorse, rather than reject, mainstream societal values.

However there is evidence of particular perceptions, attitudes and aspirations towards work that reflect the nature of socialisation that takes place within a particular milieu characterised by prolonged periods of intergenerational worklessness and limited employment opportunities for a high proportion of the resident population (Bauder,

2001; CLG, 2010a). Where cultures of worklessness are said to exist, they are characterised by lowered incentives to work - in a context where peers are also unemployed and the informal economy has a strong pull factor - and a view of joblessness as unproblematic given circumstances of lowered aspirations and short-term horizons (Ritchie *et al*, 2005). Yet critically, these attitudes and expectations do not pervade all residents of deprived neighbourhoods, nor are they confined only to these areas. In this respect they are different by *degree* rather than *kind*, reinforced by material circumstances and restricted social networks (Syrett and North, 2008).

Such attitudes and aspirations may result from peer pressure, a lack of role models (i.e. of those in employment, or more importantly still, those in good jobs with career advancement possibilities), low self-esteem and expectations (of individuals themselves and externally from employers), and limited experience, direct or indirect, of the world of work (CLG, 2010a). Differences in local perceptions and behaviours are often characterised by a narrow, insular and highly localised view of the labour market (Green and White, 2007), often reinforced by local stigma, which produces narrow travel horizons and compounds exclusion though a loose sense of attachment to the mainstream labour market (Fieldhouse, 1999).

#### *Social capital: contacts and networks*

The importance of social capital and social networks for the processes of finding, securing and maintaining employment, has been an influential theme within the policy discourse over recent years (Putnam, 2000; SEU, 2000; Taylor, 2002). This discourse is predicated upon contested concerns that deprived neighbourhoods are characterised by declining levels of social capital (SEU, 2000; Forrest and Kearns, 2001). Although the operationalisation of notions of social capital has proved problematic, there has been work on area effects relating to social contacts and networks in the labour market. This research has drawn attention to the importance of networks of families, friends, and social contacts not only in obtaining information about jobs, but also in being successful in competing for them (e.g. Shuttleworth *et al* 2003; Meadows, 2001). The resources provided through social networks are particularly significant given the importance of informal recruitment processes. As Watt (2003) demonstrated in his study of the work histories of local authority tenants in Camden, 'reputation' needs to be transmitted by word of mouth to employers so that being enmeshed in the appropriate social networks proved crucial in providing the routes by which information about jobs and workers' reputations could be circulated. Watt concluded that having the right reputation and social contacts were probably as important as the possession of training certificates.



A further issue affecting access to jobs relates to the information that workless people have about the jobs that are available within commuting distance. Some studies (e.g. Lawless 1995; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001) have found that the unemployed tend to have poor knowledge of job opportunities within the local labour market. This may be partly the result of there being inadequate information available at the local neighbourhood scale, for example if there is poor access to employment services located in city centre locations (Speak, 2000).

Within neighbourhoods where access is primarily to employment in low paid low skill jobs, a mismatch is evident between the informal recruitment methods of employers, particularly smaller employers who tend to rely on 'word of mouth' methods, and the job search routes of residents where the networks and contacts for obtaining information about job vacancies are poor (Hasluck 1999). The disadvantaged, therefore, are likely to be more dependent on family and friends as they have fewer ties to paid work and less access to job information. Yet if members of their family and friends are also out of work, this is going to separate them further from the kind of information that they need and make it more difficult to obtain employment. Dickens (1999) suggested that this kind of 'network failure' is an important factor underlying the problems in deprived neighbourhoods, reinforcing other processes creating inequalities in labour market outcomes and thereby 'tipping' deprived neighbourhoods further into a vicious cycle of decline.

### *Stigmatisation and discrimination*

There are persistent suggestions from those who live and work in deprived neighbourhoods that some employers discriminate against job seekers from such areas. The existing evidence to support employer discrimination in recruitment practices on the basis of address or postcode has to date been fairly limited. In large part this reflects the considerable challenges in researching and isolating discriminatory practice. Past studies in England have found some evidence of implicit discrimination by employers against long-term unemployed residents of a deprived neighbourhood in Sheffield which had a poor reputation (Lawless, 1995) and postcode discrimination against lone parents from stigmatised areas in Newcastle (Speak, 2000). It would appear that those seeking work often perceive that they are disadvantaged by where they live. For example, in a study of the young unemployed in Newham, Roberts (1999) found that almost a third of the interviewed young people from the most deprived parts of the borough thought that employers were put off by the area in which they lived.

The most comprehensive study undertaken specifically on this issue (Nunn et al, 2010) concluded that there was evidence from both its qualitative and quantitative analysis that postcode selection of address-based discrimination plays a modest and secondary role to personal characteristics, within very specific conditions, as a contributor to worklessness in deprived areas. However isolating such area effects from other disadvantages that individuals and groups face in the labour market is clearly very difficult. The issue of separating out place-based discrimination from other forms of discrimination is one issue here. For example, as many deprived neighbourhoods are characterised by concentrations of particular ethnic groups it is necessary to consider the relationship between racial discrimination and place based discrimination. As racial and area discrimination can be closely associated with each other, red lining certain areas is, in the minds of some employers, tantamount to shutting out certain groups of people.

#### *Physical isolation and poor public transport*

Many deprived neighbourhoods are characterised by a degree of relative physical isolation from centres of employment. The move of many employers away from areas close to town and city centres to retail and business parks which are invariably on the edge of urban areas, has in many cases exacerbated this situation. The increased separation between residential and employment areas has made it more difficult for those without private transport to access jobs. Residents of deprived neighbourhoods typically have much lower levels of vehicle ownership and are hence more reliant on often inadequate public transport (DETR, 2000; SEU, 2003). Bus routes often do not provide good links between residential and employment areas and many new jobs in the service sector involve working in the evenings and at weekends when bus services are more limited (Lucas et al, 2008; Thickett, 2011). Furthermore the relatively high cost of public transport fares can provide a major disincentive to travel to take up low paid employment. As a result the relative location of deprived neighbourhoods in relation to employment and the lack of adequate and affordable public transport can be a significant institutional barrier to improving employment prospects for residents in these areas (Sanderson, 2006).

To summarise therefore, the starting point for understanding concentrated worklessness are the characteristics of workless individuals and their households. Yet as the previous discussion has demonstrated, such characteristics are frequently bound up with neighbourhood effects that act to exacerbate and reinforce problems of labour market exclusion in certain neighbourhoods. Localised work cultures, restricted

social networks and employer discrimination against stigmatised neighbourhoods produce direct effects rooted within the areas' population characteristics, whilst place based effects emanate from the relative physical isolation of these neighbourhoods, particularly in terms of limited mobility to access jobs reflecting reliance upon often poor public transport provision.

### **Worklessness and deprived neighbourhoods: identifying difference**

The interaction between wider labour market change and localised conditions is constituted in the experiences of high levels of worklessness within particular neighbourhoods. This results in neighbourhoods having quite distinctive characteristics and experiences of employment deprivation (CLG, 2010b). The centrality of person and household factors to understanding worklessness means that the population characteristics of neighbourhood residents and their degree of mobility and related population churn, is of critical importance (Robson et al, 2008). Whilst ultimately each neighbourhood is unique, it is possible to identify key similarities and differences between neighbourhoods and the identification of certain common types (CLG, 2009a).

In their study of employment-deprived neighbourhoods in England, Lupton et al (2011) identified five groups of neighbourhoods on the basis of a number of characteristics related to claimant rates, housing, qualifications, types and sectors of employment, ethnicity, population change and per capita wealth<sup>2</sup>. The main groups they identified comprised:

- *Highly deprived social housing neighbourhoods*: neighbourhoods where social housing predominated along with extreme multiple deprivation
- *Older workers in declining areas*: consisting of more stable neighbourhoods, characterised by older workers and steady employment

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<sup>2</sup> This report identifies both a 5 group and more nuanced 10 group classification of employment-deprived neighbourhoods. These were derived using a number of selected characteristics comprising: Jobseeker's Allowance claim rate; Incapacity Benefit index; percentage social rented dwellings; percentage private rented dwellings; percentage with no qualifications; percentage employed in manufacturing; percentage employed in hotels; percentage in elementary occupations; percentage Black Caribbean ethnicity; neighbourhood population turnover; neighbourhood population change (2001-07); Gross Value Added per capita (£k).

- *High churn neighbourhoods with younger workers*: high turnover, socially mixed neighbourhoods in self-contained labour markets, with younger workers in vulnerable employment and high levels of private rented housing
- *Ethnically mixed neighbourhoods in stronger labour markets*: neighbourhoods characterised by their mixed social housing and location in buoyant cities with stronger labour markets and their young, socially and ethnically mixed populations
- *Inner London*: a type of neighbourhood found only in inner London, where values for key characteristics varied substantially from those found elsewhere.

Mapping these different types demonstrated significant regional differences in the distribution of employment-deprived neighbourhoods reflecting, amongst other factors, important differences in regional labour market supply, demand and mediating institutional factors. Such regional variations illustrate the different types of labour market contexts and processes in operation which have implications for the nature and extent of the varied neighbourhood effects related to concentrated worklessness discussed previously.

Analysis of this type points to the need for policy interventions that address concentrations of worklessness to be sensitive to the differences between deprived neighbourhoods. In addition it also points to the possibilities of learning between neighbourhoods which may not be geographically proximate but experience similar conditions and outcomes - for example those located in former mining areas, seaside towns or out of town social housing estates (Lupton et al, 2011). The differentiated spatial manifestations of the problem of concentrated neighbourhood worklessness indicate the need for different policy mixes and delivery mechanisms; ones tailored to particular neighbourhood needs but situated within an understanding of the changing nature of supply and demand in the wider local and regional labour market. The next part of the paper analyses the extent to which policy interventions developed in England under the New Labour governments (1997-2010) in relation to the problem of concentrated worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods were able to recognise and respond meaningfully to meet this policy need.

### **Policy responses to tackling worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods**

A central objective of successive New Labour governments was to move workless people into employment. This was driven by the goal of achieving “full employment”,

with the aim of raising the employment rate to 80 per cent (from 72.5 per cent in 1997), and rooted in the dominant belief that employment was the best route out of poverty. Although the number of working age people registered as unemployed fell during the first two NL administrations (from 1.9 million in 1997 to 1.4 million in 2005), this was dwarfed by the number who were economically inactive and which grew over the same period (from 7.6 million to 7.9 million), supporting arguments of a growth of 'hidden unemployment' (Beatty and Fothergill, 2002). Against this background, tackling the causes of worklessness became an urgent priority of government policy during the second and subsequent NL administrations.

New Labour's analysis of the causes of worklessness and the tendency for this to be concentrated in small geographical areas centred on the barriers to work associated with various personal and household characteristics. These were seen as adversely affecting not only the employability of individuals, but also their attitudes to looking for work in the first place. A study by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2004) emphasised the multiple causes of worklessness including the role of various place and people based area effects, stressing the interplay between different factors (e.g. lack of educational qualifications, work experience, basic and social skills, social networks, high levels of lone parenthood) that reinforced an individual's disadvantage in the labour market.

In addition to these individual and household barriers, NL thinking was also influenced by research showing how institutional factors contributed to concentrations of worklessness. Of particular significance here was the interconnection between the housing and labour markets, as housing status was considered to be the principal factor influencing where workless people live (Cheshire et al, 2003). The operation of the benefits system was also increasingly seen as a disincentive to entering the labour market, with survey evidence indicating that many people on disability and housing benefits were concerned that if they took a job they might lose the financial security and income levels that benefits provided. Other recognised institutional barriers to work included the lack of affordable transport and childcare, the latter particularly affecting lone parents.

Informed by the assumption of a relatively tight national labour market, NL's approach to tackling worklessness comprised a number of supply-side programmes and measures aimed at overcoming the barriers that workless individuals faced in entering the labour market and changing their attitudes towards obtaining employment. Through a combination of training and job readiness initiatives it was assumed that individuals

would be in a better position to compete for jobs, whilst tackling institutional barriers such as childcare and public transport provision would facilitate better access to employment. In addition it also introduced changes to the benefits system to ensure that those recipients capable of working did seek work. Ideologically, this was consistent with the shift towards a work-focused welfare state that had already been set in train by previous Conservative governments (Evans, 2001). NL's welfare programme demonstrated an incremental shift towards a 'conditional' regime whereby claimants were increasingly required to undertake some work-related or training activity in exchange for benefits or face sanctions.

The centrepiece of NL's programme was the New Deal, introduced immediately upon coming to power in 1997, and comprising a suite of 'new deals' targeting specific groups (i.e. the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed aged 25 and over, those aged 50 and over, lone parents and disabled people). Whilst the evaluation of the New Deal showed it was relatively successful for those on the margins of entering the labour market, it was less successful for those facing multiple barriers (DWP, 2008). A further notable characteristic of policy development was the introduction of a series of area-based initiatives (ABIs) to augment mainstream provision in an attempt to better reach more marginalised individuals and groups living within deprived areas. This marked ongoing recognition of the relative failure of mainstream policies to reach effectively the most disadvantaged living in poor neighbourhoods and the limitations of a highly centralised policy agenda focused primarily on national-level analysis of aggregate supply and demand. These developed through two key phases: first a focus explicitly upon the neighbourhood level, and latterly attempts to tackle concentrated worklessness within wider local and sub-regional strategies.

### ***Neighbourhood-based worklessness policies***

Awareness that other kinds of interventions were required in order to target those furthest from entering the labour market led to a succession of area-based programmes, invariably run as pilot schemes, aimed at localities experiencing persistently high levels of worklessness (Syrett and North, 2008). These comprised ABIs which targeted neighbourhoods at a policy delivery level, such as the 'Action Team for Jobs' initiative (2000 - 2006)<sup>3</sup>, and others premised upon the existence of

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<sup>3</sup> The Action Team for Jobs initiative aimed to increase employment rates among disadvantaged groups in deprived areas based on outreach work in local communities and the involvement of community and voluntary organisations as well as employers.

negative neighbourhood effects. For example in the latter case, the 'Working Neighbourhoods Pilot' initiative (2004 – 2006), aimed to counter localised 'cultures of worklessness' through providing intensive support to help people find work and incentivise them to stay in work through retention payments.

A key dimension of this plethora of activity was the introduction of neighbourhood-oriented policies where issues of worklessness were addressed as part of more comprehensive strategies to improve living and working conditions across a range of dimensions (employment, health, crime, education and skills, housing and the physical environment) with a view to narrowing the gap between these areas and the rest of the country. However one consequence of these holistic neighbourhood approaches was a degree of confusion as to whether policy was aimed at the neighbourhood itself - based upon recognition of significant place based effects - or at the communities and citizens who lived within the neighbourhoods, or indeed a mixture of both (Atkinson, 2007). Two major initiatives under New Labour were particularly significant in this respect: the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) and the New Deal for Communities (NDC).

#### *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was launched in 2001 with the objectives of lowering rates of worklessness and crime and improving health, skills, housing and the physical environment within England's poorest neighbourhoods, and to narrow the gap in relation to these elements between these neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. It was supported by dedicated funding (mainly the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund later reformed into the Working Neighbourhood Fund) but also aimed to improve the delivery of mainstream public services within the poorest neighbourhoods. This funding supported a range of local authority-led worklessness programmes targeted at hard-to-reach clients, predominantly in the forms of advice, guidance and support, but also supporting some transitional employment schemes and business and enterprise support.

The impact of the NSNR on levels of worklessness appears to have been broadly positive, although much depends upon the spatial level at which the analysis was conducted. The Government's own evaluation of the NSNR considered change at the levels of the local authority district and the neighbourhood (CLG, 2010b). At local authority district level, in the period after 2001, there was a consistent improvement against key worklessness indicators in those districts that qualified for the

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. This was not just in absolute terms, as would be expected in a period of national employment growth (the worklessness rate in England fell from 9.8 per cent in 2001 to 8.9 per cent in 2007) but also relative to the national average (CLG, 2010b). Employment rates also improved and the gap with the national average narrowed to 75 per cent of the 2001 figure, although there was considerable variation in performance across the nine English regions.

At the neighbourhood level, the worklessness rate of the most deprived 10 per cent Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs)<sup>4</sup> improved in relation to the national average of all LSOAs, although it remained more than seven times that of the least deprived neighbourhoods. However, when rates within the most deprived 10 per cent LSOAs within each district (for both NSNR and non-NSNR areas) were compared with their respective district averages, the gap widened slightly, indicating the stubbornness of the worklessness problem in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Moreover, the analysis also showed that as economic growth slowed from 2006, it was these most deprived neighbourhoods that were the most vulnerable to rising levels of worklessness.(CLG, 2010b).

In analysing evidence of the contribution of the NSNR to tackling issues of worklessness locally, the national evaluation local research report concluded that in relation to employment there were 'variable rates of improvement and limited impact' (CLG, 2010a: 5). This report pointed out that NSNR interventions generally had a "more consistently positive impact upon the symptoms of neighbourhood deprivation (for example crime, environmental factors and aspects of public health) as opposed to its root causes (including worklessness and low educational attainment)" (CLG, 2010a:8). In the majority of the case study NRF districts evaluated, there had been a narrowing of the gap in relation to employment. But evidence of progress was mixed (e.g. there was also evidence of a decline in the ethnic minority employment rate and/or increases in long-term claimants) and local perceptions of worklessness often remained pessimistic.

Overall, the NSNR appears to have had a marginal positive impact on employment outcomes when integrated with wider worklessness strategies (CLG, 2010a: 30). Where positive improvement in relation to worklessness was evident in case study

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<sup>4</sup> A Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) is the smallest geographical area designed for the collection and publication of small area statistics within England and Wales.



NRF districts, this was due to favourable national economic conditions producing job opportunities and rising employment rates and supported by the availability of sometimes significant levels of focused long term investment (not just via the NRF but also from other area based programmes), which permitted local authority led employment services targeted at hard to reach client groups to be supplemented. Where worklessness remained a considerable problem, key barriers identified included neighbourhood effects related to embedded cultural factors which constrained the uptake and impact of employment programmes (comprising a lack of role models, inter-generational unemployment, low aspirations, resistance to travelling to work, poor work ethic), combined with a reduction in the availability of job opportunities and 'access to decent work' and the negative impact of population churn, and organisational barriers (e.g. the failure of key organisations such as Jobcentre Plus to develop targeted modes of delivery) (CLG, 2010a).

#### *New Deal for Communities (NDC)*

The need to tackle unemployment and economic inactivity in turning around the poorest neighbourhoods was a critical element of New Labour's flagship New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, launched in 1998 as a 10-year £2 billion programme focused on 39 designated areas. The programme was designed to improve outcomes in the NDC areas in relation to 'place-based' issues (crime, the community, housing and physical environment) and 'people-based' issues (education, health and worklessness).

The severity of the worklessness problem found in the NDC areas was substantial. In 1999 there were an estimated 50,710 workless people (defined as being involuntarily excluded from the labour market and claiming out-of-work benefits) in NDC areas, representing 23 per cent of the total working-age population (CRESR, 2005). By 2008, there were still 45,800 workless residents representing an average of 18.4 per cent substantially higher than 8.9 per cent national average. However this average figure masks considerable variation across NDC areas from a lowest rate of 10.8 per cent to a highest of 29.8 per cent (Beatty et al, 2009b).

Across the programme, 11 per cent of total NDC expenditure was allocated to tackling worklessness over the 2000-2006 period (CRESR, 2005; Beatty et al, 2009b). This resource was used in the development of local strategies for tackling worklessness (analysing needs, objective setting, targeting of priority groups), working with other local partners, particularly public bodies, such as Jobcentre Plus, as well as voluntary

bodies and to a much more limited extent, the private sector. Typically interventions focused upon supply-side interventions comprising combined job brokerage and information advice and guidance projects, recruitment and job matching services with local businesses, and skill development projects (often sectorally focused). On a much more limited scale were demand-side projects including Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) projects (that sought to create short term jobs to develop participants skills and experience), the creation of jobs for local people through Section 106 Agreements<sup>5</sup>, and business support projects promoting enterprise activity (Beatty et al, 2009b).

Despite this considerable activity, the overall impact upon aggregate worklessness rates within NDC areas was limited. In absolute terms the worklessness rate (comprising both Job Seeker Allowance and Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disability Allowance claimants) across the NDC Programme did fall significantly by four percentage points from 22 to 18 per cent across the 1999-2008 period. However, in comparison to similarly-deprived comparator areas in the same local authorities, the decrease in worklessness in NDC areas was only marginally greater. As Beatty et al (2009b:15-16) conclude: "There is no evidence as yet to indicate that NDC areas were seeing more in the way of improvement to worklessness than were similar neighbourhoods in the same local authority". Yet the NDC evaluation also provided evidence of very positive responses from local informants and beneficiaries that the development of flexible employment-related services tailored to address the needs of local people and area effects at the neighbourhood level had been highly beneficial (CLG, 2008). And for individual participants there was evidence that participation in such projects did increase the likelihood of making the transition from not being in employment in 2002 to being in employment by 2004 (CLG, 2009b).

The difference between positive neighbourhood experiences of worklessness interventions and limited programme-wide impacts within the NDC programme – a difference evident in many other ABIs too - illustrates a major measurement challenge (Beatty et al, 2009b). The programme-wide change data reflects the considerable

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<sup>5</sup> A Section 106 Agreement permits a local planning authority to enter into a legally-binding agreement with a landowner/developer such that the granting of planning permission is dependent upon the provision of certain services and infrastructure, such as highways, recreational facilities, education, health and affordable housing.

changes affecting the NDC areas, as people move in and out of both employment and the NDC areas, thereby disguising some of the impacts of the programme (CRESR, 2007). It was found that out-movers from NDC areas were more likely to be employed (71 per cent of those of working age) than in-movers (47 per cent) or stayers (55 per cent). In this context of wider flux, individual-level changes and gains that result from neighbourhood interventions seeking to move individuals closer to the labour market are lost or difficult to pick up within the wider data collection.

### ***Workless neighbourhoods in their local and sub-regional contexts***

As the neighbourhood policy agenda developed, in terms of addressing issues of worklessness within deprived neighbourhoods, a substantial policy and governance disconnect emerged (Syrett and North, 2010). Much neighbourhood policy became focused upon issues of public service delivery and was poorly integrated with the market-led regional and urban policies focused upon strengthening competitiveness which, in turn, paid little or no attention to how these activities might benefit the most deprived neighbourhoods (North et al, 2007). In response, central government sought to refocus neighbourhood-level policy more directly upon jobs and enterprise (ODPM, 2004; PSMU, 2005), while Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were issued guidance to refocus their role to take greater account of the needs of their most deprived areas (DTI, 2005; PMSU, 2005).

At the base of these changes was increased recognition that the roots of employment problems that beset deprived neighbourhoods lay within the wider local and regional labour markets within which they were embedded rather than as the result of neighbourhood effects, and hence effective policy action required integrated activity across spatial levels and greater freedom for locally and sub-regionally managed interventions (CLG, 2006). This view was reflected in the major Treasury-led review of subnational economic development and regeneration policy (SNR) which saw a major change in the direction of policy development and governance arrangements (HM Treasury et al, 2007). In relation to deprived neighbourhoods the SNR marked a shift in the relative importance of spatial levels, away from the neighbourhood and the region, towards an emphasis upon the local and the sub-regional alongside a greater economic focus within neighbourhood renewal policy (CLG, 2009c). In term of tackling worklessness, and as part of the government's aspiration to achieve an 80 per cent employment rate, this line of policy thinking led to the introduction of the City Strategy

initiative, as a first attempt to develop a more sub-regionally based and locally-managed approach to tackling high levels of economic inactivity within major cities.

The City Strategy (CS) initiative was intended to combat issues of worklessness and poverty in urban areas by empowering local stakeholders to develop policy interventions tailored to specific local circumstances (Green and Orton, 2012). The key objectives comprised significantly improving employment rates, particularly among the most disadvantaged, and ensuring individuals were better able to find and remain in work as well as improve their skills so they could progress in work. Fifteen cities and city-regions<sup>6</sup> with employment rates below the national average were selected to be the pilot 'pathfinders' for the 2007-2009 period, and the initiative was extended until March 2011. The City Strategy initiative was not primarily about the provision of new money but rather focused upon getting better value from existing service provision. Strategies were seen as a way of pooling resources and funding streams, and of integrating a range of employment, training and health provision targeted at disadvantaged groups and neighbourhoods. Each area received seedcorn money to establish consortia made up of government agency providers, local government and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), the private sector, the voluntary sector and the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

In practice the City Strategy Pathfinders (CSPs) provided support to mainstream provision by plugging gaps and offering supplementary services to specific individual or client groups. Many CSPs chose to target their resources either by area or by sub-group of benefit claimers, with activities focused upon client and employer engagement. The CSPs demonstrated considerable variation in relation to the extent and nature of spatial targeting towards those areas of concentrated worklessness and did not explicitly recognise neighbourhood effects. However most did use client engagement strategies that involved community based outreach work which necessarily had some element of spatial organisation (Green et al, 2010).

Unfortunately the extent to which spatial targeting within the CS impacted upon worklessness within deprived neighbourhoods was difficult to ascertain. Firstly, the scale of the CSs varied significantly as did their relative focus upon strategy and delivery, making comparison between them difficult. Secondly, the CSs operated in a

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<sup>6</sup> These comprised: Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country; Blackburn with Darwen; East London; Greater Manchester; Leicester; Merseyside, Nottingham; South Yorkshire; Tyne and Wear; West London; Dundee; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Heads of the Valleys; Rhyl.

period of dramatic change both in terms of labour market conditions and policy. The onset of a deep and prolonged recession made moving long-term workless individuals into employment much more difficult and led to a shift in emphasis towards the newly unemployed. In addition this period saw large changes in policy particularly the introduction of a major welfare reform process as well as policy initiatives designed to address the consequences of the recession. Consequently measuring the effect of CS upon levels of worklessness through quantitative analysis has proved difficult with issues of attribution and value-added remaining largely unanswered (Green et al, 2010).

### **The impact of policy interventions**

Although in the period prior to the impact of the economic recession (1997-2007), there was some success in getting more people into work and raising the employment rate for lone parents, those with a health condition or disability and those from ethnic minority groups (DWP, 2007), there was no significant diminution in the gap in levels of worklessness between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest. Analysis of spatially-disaggregated evidence relating to changes in the number of people in receipt of out-of-work benefits (based on DWP longitudinal data) demonstrates that the gap between the most deprived areas (defined as the 10 per cent of Super Output Areas with the highest concentration of claimants) and the least deprived areas remained largely unchanged between 2000-2008, indicating the lack of success of NL's policies in this respect (The Poverty Site, 2010). The impact of the recession exacerbated this situation. Analysis of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) rates demonstrated that the 10 per cent of areas with the highest JSA claimant rates experienced a greater absolute increase in claim rates from seven per cent to nine per cent in the 2005-09 period whilst areas with the lowest rates saw an increase from one per cent to two per cent (Tunstall, 2009).

In terms of neighbourhood-level approaches to tackling worklessness, the evidence from programmes such as the NDC and NSNR demonstrates that intensive neighbourhood-level interventions do not have a major impact upon the objective of reducing worklessness (Beatty et al, 2009b; CLG, 2010a). Such interventions demonstrate that tackling the worklessness problems of deprived neighbourhoods requires understanding the linkages between these neighbourhoods and the wider labour and residential markets in which they are embedded. For example in relation to population mobility, there is some evidence that residents of deprived neighbourhoods

who improve their labour market skills through training or mentoring initiatives and get a new or better job then leave the area, the so-called 'get on and get out' scenario. However whilst there is evidence that higher levels of mobility are marginally associated with poorer outcomes (CRESR, 2007), what is more apparent is that processes of population mobility, employment and neighbourhood change are related in multiple and complex ways (CLG, 2009a; CLG, 2010a; Lawless, 2011).

The level of the neighbourhood is not the best level for seeking to understand and respond to these wider changes in local labour markets, and their relationships with housing markets and changing employer requirements. Given the only minor impacts of neighbourhood effects in causing concentrated worklessness, there is little reason to expect interventions targeted at such effects would result in any significant changes in levels of worklessness. In contrast bodies operating at a wider scale, such as local authorities and sub-regional bodies (e.g. city-regions), are better placed to devise strategies within which neighbourhood level interventions can then be developed (Beatty et al, 2009b; Lawless, 2011). This is particularly important with respect to the key role of demand-side conditions for tackling problems of concentrated worklessness. Studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of labour demand (Syrett and North, 2008; Beatty et al, 2009; Green et al, 2010) but the policy agenda largely ignored this issue, particularly in the period of employment growth up until 2007. NL governments consistently maintained that employment growth in the national economy meant that there was no shortage of job opportunities in most places and the vast majority of policy activity targeted at worklessness had a narrow supply-side focus. Yet this ran counter to research evidence (e.g. Webster, 2000; Beatty and Fothergill, 2002; Coombes and Raybould, 2004) showing that there continued to be insufficient jobs within commutable distances in areas with the highest levels of worklessness, especially in those areas that had borne the brunt of de-industrialisation.

Where there had been at least a modest growth in the numbers of jobs (such as in low value added services), the sustainability of these jobs was often questionable. Frequently these jobs were not sufficiently well-paid or attractive in terms of hours, security and future prospects to make movement off welfare benefits a rational choice (Beatty et al, 2009a). The ability of job seekers to compete for jobs was also affected

by the competition that they faced from in-migrant workers, particularly from the A8<sup>7</sup> countries, as it was found that employers often preferred workers from elsewhere in the EU because they were perceived to have a stronger work ethic (Green, 2007).

In practice there is little evidence of neighbourhood-level interventions oriented towards these demand side issues. This is not surprising, given that institutions operating at this level are poorly placed to develop such interventions that are likely to be highly costly, to require wider strategic overview and result in considerable leakage from the neighbourhood scale. However, neighbourhood-oriented employment policies variously developed under an array of area-based interventions have demonstrated an ability to respond to the particular problems of those living within areas of concentrated worklessness. These initiatives were effective in filling the gaps in mainstream service provision through delivering or developing localised, flexible schemes to support workless individuals back into employment (Beatty et al, 2010b) and proved better able to provide the outreach and more intensive levels of personalised and holistic support required by those people facing the most severe and multiple barriers to employment. In this respect, such initiatives sought to deal simultaneously with a range of individual and household factors and any compounding neighbourhood effects. Other evidence, based on a review of various evaluations of government employment programmes, also concluded that 'place-based' policies aimed at getting people into work tended to be noticeably better in terms of outcomes achieved than mainstream 'person-targeted' policies (Griggs et al, 2008). However, it is important to recognise that the implementation of place-based approaches is time-consuming, resource intensive and relatively expensive.

One outcome of the period of neighbourhood-focused policy under New Labour was a better practical understanding of 'what works' in tackling worklessness (Sanderson, 2006; Meadows, 2008; Policy Research Institute, 2007, Syrett and North, 2008; Beatty et al, 2009). More effective initiatives were characterised by an emphasis upon outreach activities that proactively engaged with the most disadvantaged groups furthest from entering the labour market. Clients were found to be more responsive to

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<sup>7</sup> The A8 countries comprise eight of the ten countries that joined the European Union in 2004 from Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia)

voluntary initiatives and services were more likely to be effective if located in familiar and accessible community-based facilities and delivered by trusted local voluntary or community-based organisations.

Also important given the diverse and multiple barriers to employment that individuals face, personalised and holistic approaches enabled the provision of specialist help (in relation to issues of health, drug or alcohol abuse, debt, housing and family breakdown) alongside employment-related support on issues such as skills, language difficulties, job search and making applications. In this respect the key role for trusted and motivated personal advisors or mentors was frequently identified. Such advisors can operate flexibly in relation to an individual's needs, providing continuity of support and guidance to appropriate sources of specialist help at the right times, and build up self-esteem and provide contact with positive role models.

Provision which gave support throughout a long-term process of labour market engagement - starting with pre-employment training and confidence building and continuing through to support for job search and interview preparation and ongoing training both in and out of employment - was found to be more successful. Critical here was an emphasis upon job retention and progression and not just getting workless people into work, so as to ensure a period of sustained employment, which entailed continuing support for people once they had obtained work.

The active involvement and good relations with employers was also crucial given their role in controlling access to job opportunities, so that initiatives were informed of available job vacancies and what employers were looking for in order to help workless people become job ready and make them able to compete for the jobs on offer. Being able to influence employers' recruitment practices in favour of disadvantaged groups and to redress discriminatory practices required building trusted relationships over time (Nunn et al, 2010). Yet studies also show that meaningful employer engagement frequently remains restricted in practice (Green et al, 2010).

## **Conclusions**

Interventions conceived at the neighbourhood level are poorly positioned to address changes in labour market supply and demand operating at wider spatial scales which are the primary causes of concentrated worklessness. However, they can play a vital role in tailoring supply-side initiatives to meet local circumstances and significantly



improve policy delivery to disadvantaged individuals and communities. In this respect they can address both the various neighbourhood effects that compound high levels of worklessness - for example in relation to improving information flows, developing employment networks and job linkages and addressing discriminatory practice and localised cultural attitudes - and locally-constituted institutional barriers, for example in relation to transport and childcare.

Indeed given the scale of the problem of worklessness within deprived areas and the major structural changes taking place within labour markets and their contribution to rising levels of inequality (National Equality Panel, 2010), any expectation that modestly-resourced neighbourhood level initiatives would generate major changes in aggregate levels of worklessness appears somewhat misplaced. As Beatty et al (2009b) point out, even in the example of the NDC Programme which was considered 'well funded', the total spend on the worklessness outcome amounted to about £380 per workless individual per year, a scale of spending unlikely to have a major impact upon localised worklessness. Significantly, the global financial crisis and ensuing economic downturn led to a rapid growth in unemployment nationally from 2008 and created an environment in which tackling concentrated worklessness is considerably more difficult than in comparison to the period of employment growth which provided the context for NL's policy initiatives.

For neighbourhood-level actions to have any significant impact on levels of concentrated worklessness, these need to be integrated with wider economic strategies that impact upon the availability of appropriate employment opportunities within the local and regional economy. Yet such integration requires strong partnership working in tackling worklessness and in practice the extent of this is variable. There are a number of well-established and long-standing barriers to more effective policy integration within and across spatial scales (North and Syrett, 2008; Green and Orton, 2012). The complex governance system that evolved in England over the NL years combined with a plethora of central government initiatives made co-ordination and integration of policy difficult to pursue in practice. The highly centralised nature of the vast majority of this policy activity and lack of integration between central state departments which dominated governance arrangements, meant sub-national institutions lacked the power and resources to develop and manage local and regional worklessness strategies. As labour markets operate predominantly at local and sub-regional scales and are best addressed at this level - for example in terms of identifying skills needs, providing appropriate education and training, developing employer

engagement and new employment sites and linkages to deprived communities – the lack of strategic and delivery capacity at this level presented a major constraint.

Yet whatever the strength and nature of the subnational governance system and the wider global economic changes, in relation to labour market regulation and welfare provision the central state retains a key role regarding work and worklessness within deprived neighbourhoods. Given the primacy of people-based characteristics in understanding supply-side causes of worklessness, mainstream policies relating to skills and education are of critical importance, as are those that address key institutional barriers such as childcare, transport and housing. In relation to welfare payments and ‘making work pay’ – a key issue within deprived communities - the current reforms of benefits being pursued by the Coalition government are likely to have profound, and potentially highly damaging, impacts upon the nature and constitution of concentrated worklessness, far greater than any neighbourhood based initiatives. There remains considerable scope for effecting change in relation to pay and working conditions for low-income workers, through stronger regulation at the bottom end of the labour market. However given the commitment of successive governments to the promotion of labour market flexibility there has been little appetite to pursue further this type of regulatory activity.

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